

# Family Reconciliation Services



Keeping Families Together



*Washington State*  
Department of Social  
& Health Services

**Children's Administration**



## Intent of the Law

In the Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 (Chapter 13.32A RCW), the legislature declared that “the family is the fundamental resource of American life which should be nurtured and remain intact in absence of compelling evidence to the contrary.”

In 1990 the legislature amended the act to include at-risk youths. In 1995 the legislature added children in need of services. This legislation is intended to:

- Help parents having problems with at-risk youth;
- Provide a court process for parents or youths to seek help with serious conflicts at home; and
- Help families and youths obtain treatment, protection, and other care.

## Family Reconciliation Services

The state of Washington offers Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) through the Department of Social and Health Services, Children’s Administration (CA), Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS). FRS helps families deal with problems such as a child running away, not following reasonable families rules, or serious problems between parents and their child.

Any youth and parent who are having serious conflicts, any parent whose child has runaway, or any runaway youth may ask for FRS. DCFS provides services to teenagers age 13 through 17 and their families.

FRS seeks to achieve reconciliation between the parent and child, to reunify the family, and to maintain and strengthen the family unit. Services consist of intake/assessment, crisis counseling, and, when appropriate, short-term placement of the youth out of the home.

Parents or the youth may request FRS at the DCFS office in the area in which they live. If the youth has run to another community, the youth may request services by contacting the DCFS office in that community. The telephone numbers for DCFS offices are found in the telephone book under government listings for the state of Washington.

The youth and/or family usually have a telephone conversation, followed by an appointment, with a social worker. The social worker, the youth, and the family will discuss what is happening in the family and what the family and the youth can do to resolve their conflicts. The social worker may refer the family to crisis counseling or to other services to try to resolve the conflict.

FRS services are intended to keep the family together. Services are voluntary on the part of the family. They bring the youth and parents together to try to resolve conflicts. CA Intake and contracted counselors make counseling and other services available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no cost to the family.

After reasonable efforts at resolving conflict have failed to achieve reconciliation, a brief out-of-home placement is a possibility under the most critical conditions while the family and the youth continue to work toward resolution of the conflict. If the youth is placed in out-of-home care, the youth's parents will be expected to contribute toward the cost of the youth's care. The department's Division of Child Support determines the parents' level of participation in the cost of care.

## Police Custody of a Youth

A police officer must take a youth into custody in any of the following circumstances:

1. If a parent reports to police that the youth is away from home without the parent's permission.
2. If a police officer reasonably believes that the youth is in danger due to the youth's age, location, and/or the time of day.
3. If a youth runs away from a foster home or group home, and the agency legally responsible for the youth notifies police that the youth has run away.
4. If a juvenile court tells police that a youth has violated a juvenile court placement order or that the court has issued an order for police to pick up the youth.

After taking a youth into custody, the policy officer will take the youth to the parent's home or job site and tell the family about services available in the area.

When it is not possible for the youth to be returned home, the officer may take the youth to a Secure Crisis Residential Center (SCRC), if one is available. If the SCRC is unavailable, the officer may take the youth to a staff-secure CRC or to DCFS for placement. Or, the officer may take the youth to a responsible relative, other responsible adult, or licensed youth shelter. The officer will notify DCFS when making a CRC or SCRC placement, or the CRC or SCRC staff will notify DCFS following the placement. The CRC or SCRC staff will discuss FRS with the family.



## Other Options for Youths and Parents

### Crisis Residential Center (CRC) Placement

When a youth is placed in a CRC or other licensed facility, the goal is to return the youth to the youth's family as quickly as possible. In communities where secure (locked) CRCs are available, the youth placed in such a facility must remain there for at least 24 hours. After 24 hours, the youth will be moved to an unlocked but staff-secure CRC if the youth is not likely to run away and is not in danger of hurting him/herself or others. The youth may stay at either a secure or a staff-secure CRC for up to five days.

The youth and family may receive family counseling during the CRC placement to try to resolve conflicts and reunite the family.

When conflict is so severe that the youth cannot return home within five days, CRC and FRS staff will discuss other options with the family: Parents allowing the youth to stay for a short time with friends or relatives; arranging with DCFS for a brief placement in a foster home; the filing of an At-Risk Youth petition; or the filing of a Child in Need of Services petition. DCFS will consider agreeing to foster care placement only when all other family and community resources have been considered, and DCFS has agreed that no other viable option is available.

## Community Multi-Disciplinary Team

Parents or the youth may ask for a community multi-disciplinary team, when available, to help them resolve conflicts and become involved in counseling or other services. The team acts as a support system for both the parents and the youth. The youth and the family may ask that people they know, such as ministers, coaches, teachers, friends, or relatives, participate on the team.

## At-Risk Youth Petition

Washington state law defines an At-Risk Youth (ARY) as a juvenile:

- (a) who is absent from home for at least 72 consecutive hours without consent of the youth's parent;
- (b) who is beyond the control of the youth's parent such that the youth's behavior endangers the health, safety, or welfare of the youth or any other person; or
- (c) who has a substance abuse problem for which there are no pending criminal charges related to the substance abuse.

An At-Risk Youth petition allows custodial parents to ask for a juvenile court's help in keeping their adolescent at home and setting reasonable conditions that the youth must follow, such as going to school, following family rules, or attending counseling sessions. If the youth disobeys a court order, the youth may be held in contempt of court and placed in a detention facility for up to seven days.



Parents requesting an ARY petition keep legal custody of the youth. Parents do not have to pay for the FRS assessment and counseling but may have to pay for other services. Parents must complete a family assessment with the local DCFS office prior to filing the ARY petition.

## **Child in Need of Services (CHINS)**

When counseling, living with relatives, or similar efforts fail to resolve conflicts between a youth and the youth's parents and the youth or parents want the youth placed outside the home, the youth or parent may be able to file a CHINS petition.

Washington state law defines a child in need of services as a juvenile:

- (a) who is beyond the control of the youth's parent, such that the youth's behavior endangers the health, safety, or welfare of the youth or other person;
- (b) who has been reported to law enforcement as absent without consent for at least 24 consecutive hours on two or more separate occasions from the home of either parent, a CRC, an out-of-home placement, or a court-ordered placement; and
  - (i) has exhibited a serious substance abuse problem; or
  - (ii) has exhibited behaviors that create a serious risk of harm to the health, safety, or welfare of the child or any other person; or

- (c) (i) who is in need of necessary services, including food, shelter, health care, clothing, or education; or services designed to maintain or reunite the family;
- (ii) who lacks access to, or has declined to utilize, these services; and
- (iii) whose parents have evidenced continuing but unsuccessful efforts to maintain the family structure or are unable or unwilling to continue efforts to maintain the family structure.

Parents may file a CHINS petition when conditions regarding the youth outlined in the definition are present. The youth or the DCFS social worker may file a CHINS petition if any of the above conditions exist, particularly if the parent will not allow the youth to live in the parent's home and will not arrange another place for the youth to live.

The person filing the petition must show that the person has tried to work out the conflict, that all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted, and that it is best for the youth to live outside the home while the family continues to work toward resolution of the conflict. A parent or child filing the petition must complete a family assessment with the local DCFS office social worker prior to filing the CHINS petition.

If the court approves the out-of-home placement, the youth will normally live with a relative or in a licensed foster home. The department supervises the placement and facilitates delivery of services only if the child is placed in a licensed foster home or with a relative that is not required to be licensed. If the court chooses to place the youth in a non-relative, unlicensed home, DCFS closes the case and informs the court of that action.

The parents or DCFS may request dismissal of the CHINS court proceeding if DCFS cannot provide services because:

- (a) The youth has been absent from court approved placement for 30 consecutive days or more;
- (b) The parents or the youth, or all of them, refuse to cooperate in available, appropriate intervention aimed at reunifying the family; or
- (c) The department has exhausted all available and appropriate resources that would result in reunification.

The court will hold a review hearing within 90 days to check on the family's progress in getting back together. If the youth cannot return home when the review hearing occurs, the youth will remain in placement for up to six more months. After nine months, the child must return home.

The court may order the parents to participate in counseling with the youth or other services to help the youth return to the family as soon as possible.

If the youth fails to follow a CHINS order, the judge may find the youth in contempt of court and fine the youth and/or confine the youth in detention for up to seven days. A parent may also be subject to contempt proceedings for failure to follow court orders.

For more information about FRS, ARY, or CHINS, call the Family Reconciliation Services number listed in your telephone directory under Washington State, Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Children and Family Services.

## **Community Resources**

### **Treatment Services**

For mental health services, the youth and/or the parents should contact the local community mental health center directly.

For information about chemical dependency programs, the youth and/or the parents should call the 24-Hour Alcohol/Drug Helpline toll free AT 1-800-562-1240 (Washington only).

### **Facts about School Attendance**

DSHS does not participate in activity related to truancy. For additional information, contact your local school district or county juvenile court.

Washington law requires all children who are at least age 8 and under 18 years old to attend public, private, or home school. The school may temporarily excuse a student when parents and school personnel agree on the reason for the absence.

Youths are not required to attend school if they are 16 years or older and:

- (a) The youths' parents agree that they do not need to attend or the youths are legally emancipated; and
- (b) The youths are regularly and gainfully employed; or
- (c) Have met graduation requirements; or
- (d) Have received a GED.

*Consequences for unexcused absences:*

**School officials must:**

- Notify parents after one unexcused absence in a month;
- Schedule a conference with the parent and child after two unexcused absences in any month;
- Take steps to help the child reduce the child's absences (such as adjusting the school program, giving individual help to the student);
- File a truancy petition with the court after seven unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in a year.

## **Courts:**

- Must provide notice and hold a hearing;
- May order the parent to pay a fine for each day of unexcused absence or to provide community service at the child's school;
- May find the child in contempt of court for refusing to attend school and sentence the child to up to seven days in a locked detention facility or to pay a fine, order community service, or refer the case to a community truancy board.

## **Police:**

May take a youth who is truant into custody and deliver the child to school, the child's parent, or a district program for truant students.





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